

X.—The Successor of Speusippus¹

PHILIP MERLAN

SCRIPPS COLLEGE

From a passage in the *Academicorum philosophorum index Herculanensis*, col. vi-vii, it follows that, at the time of the death of Speusippus, Aristotle was still considered as eligible for the headship of the Academy. This passage can be defended against other sources which present the events in question in a different manner.

When Aristotle joined the Academy, he was about seventeen. He was Plato's pupil for twenty years — that is, Plato had opportunity to observe him when he was a youth, and when he became a man. And yet, it was Speusippus, not Aristotle, who succeeded Plato. The question why has always been challenging. Did Plato (or whoever was responsible for it) underrate Aristotle?² Was Speusippus favored as his uncle's nephew? Or were there any quite external, perhaps legal, considerations which brought about the decision?³ We do not know, and unless new evidence is discovered, all answers will remain highly conjectural.

Less challenging but still interesting enough is another question — hardly ever asked, though very similar to the one discussed above: Why was Speusippus succeeded by Xenocrates, and not by Aristotle?

The simple answer seems to be: Why, certainly Aristotle could not succeed Speusippus as head of the Academy. Had not Aristotle a philosophy which was incompatible with the philosophy of the Academy?

Unfortunately, things are not quite so simple. When Aristotle left the Academy and Athens after Plato's death, he went to Asia Minor in the company of Xenocrates. He lived there in a circle of Platonists like Erastus and Coriscus. Nothing indicates that

¹ Part of the content of this paper was presented orally at the meeting of the Philological Association of the Pacific Coast on November 28, 1942; see also *PAPhA* 75 (1944) xxvi.

² It will be forever tempting to see in Aristotle, one of the interlocutors in Plato's *Parmenides*, Aristotle the philosopher. Alas, not a bit of evidence can be produced in favor of such an interpretation, and, thus, we have to take cognizance of the fact that Plato never mentioned Aristotle in his writings, while he did mention, e.g. Socrates the Younger.

³ See W. Jaeger, *Aristotle* (Eng. transl., Oxford, 1934) 110 f.

he was not considered a Platonist at this time. Invited by Theophrastus, he went to Mytilene and founded a philosophic school; but recent investigations, particularly by Bignone, prove that this school also was considered to be Platonic.⁴

Some two years after his arrival in Mytilene, Aristotle was invited by Philip to Macedon, an invitation which finished Aristotle's sojourn in Asia Minor and Lesbos and brought him to Philip's court. It was during Aristotle's sojourn there that Speusippus died and his successor had to be found. Now, Speusippus outlived Plato only by nine years. Of these nine years Aristotle spent a substantial part (three to five years) among Platonists and during this time considered himself and was considered by others a Platonist. Hence, the question why he did not succeed Speusippus cannot be dismissed so hastily by the assumption that he was *hors concours*, being a non-Platonist or even anti-Platonist.

It is only after such considerations that we can appreciate properly a report containing the answer to this question. It is the passage in the *Academicorum philosophorum index Herculanensis* reading:

"The young men, casting their votes as to who should become their leader, elected Xenocrates of Chalcedon, while Aristotle had gone to Macedon and while Menedemos of Pyrrha and Heraclides of Heraclea were defeated by a narrow margin of votes."⁵

This short notice is extremely interesting. First of all, it contains a clear statement as to the way in which the leaders of the Academy were appointed. It turns out that it was by election. T. Gomperz seems to have been the first to discuss the implications of this information.⁶ But this side of the notice interests us only

⁴ E. Bignone, *L'Aristotele perduto e la formazione filosofica di Epicuro*; cf. my review in *Gnomon* 17 (1941) 32–41. My discussion of Aristotle's life is based on Jaeger, *op. cit.* (see note 3) 110–117, 124 f. The Platonism of Theophrastus himself (obvious not only in the fragments of his *Περὶ ἐνσέβειας* preserved in Porphyry's *De abstinence* but even in the fragment of his *Metaphysics*) is another interesting problem.

⁵ Col. vi–vii, p. 38 f. Mekler: οἱ δ(ὲ) νεανίσκοι ψηφ(ο)φορήσαν(τ)ες ὅστις αὐτῶν ἡγή[σ]ετα(ι) Ξενοκράτη(ν) εἰλοντο τὸν (Κα)λχηδόνιον, Ἀρι(σ)τοτέλους (μ)ὲν ἀποδεδημηκότος εἰς Μακεδονίαν, Μεγέδημου δὲ τοῦ Πυρραίου καὶ Ἡρακλείδου τοῦ Ἡρακλεώτου παρ' ὀλίγας ψήφους ἡττηθέντων.

⁶ *Greek Thinkers* (English transl.) 2.272; cf. 3.308 f.; idem, "Platonische Aufsätze. II. Die angebliche platonische Schulbibliothek und die Testamente der Philosophen" (SAWW 141 [1899] 9); U. v. Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Antigonos von Karystos* (Philologische Untersuchungen hg. von A. Kiessling und U. v. Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, Heft A [Berlin, 1881]) 286 f.; Friedrich Leo, *Die griechisch-römische Biographie* (Leipzig, 1901) 59.

incidentally. In the present context more significant is the information that it was because he was absent from Athens, at the time of the election, that Aristotle did not succeed Speusippus. This implies clearly that the eligibility of Aristotle was considered a matter of course; nay, the order of the names in the notice seems to indicate that Aristotle undoubtedly would have been elected, had he been available. The members of the Academy, at the time of Speusippus' death, still counted Aristotle as one of them.

But is this report trustworthy? Could we not argue the following way?

"The author of our passage was not sufficiently informed of the fact that Aristotle, at Speusippus' death, was no longer a Platonist. He had read only such of Aristotle's esoteric writings as he published when still a Platonist. Hence he wondered why he did not succeed Speusippus. And the only way he could explain it was his assumption that it was because of Aristotle's absence. So what we have before us is not a factual report but a speculative solution of what the author of our notice thought to be a problem but which, in fact, was no problem at all."

The artificiality of such an explanation is obvious. First, it presupposes that because *we* see clearly the incompatibility of the doctrines of Aristotle with the opinions held by the Academy, the Academy also must have seen its relation to Aristotle in the same way we do. This is wrong methodically. Secondly, and this is even more important, it presupposes that the Academy was a philosophical school in our sense of the word, trying to establish a logically consistent and systematically coherent body of doctrine. Certainly the doctrines of Aristotle contradict some Platonic and Academic doctrines; but just how important was such a doctrinal contradiction to Aristotle and the Platonists?⁷

But the impression of the reliability of our report is based first of all on the fact that it contains a piece of "inside" information. Only such inside information could have acquainted the author of

⁷ After all, it is striking enough that one could deny the theory of ideas and become the head of the Academy. What about Plato himself? Did he remain true to that theory? The answer, and a remarkable one, is to be found in the (of course, genuine; see Jaeger, *op. cit.* [see note 3] 111 f.) *Sixth Letter* where we read with Jaeger: *πρὸς τῇ τῶν εἰδῶν σοφίᾳ (τῇ καλῇ ταύτῃ, φημ' ἐγὼ, καίπερ γέρων ὢν) προσδεῖ σοφίας τῆς περὶ τοὺς πονηροὺς καὶ ἀδίκους φυλακτικῆς*. . . . "I still consider the theory of ideas to be beautiful, though I am an old man," says Plato with a curious blend of detachment from and attachment to this theory. For comment see my *Platons Form der philosophischen Mitteilung* (Lwów, 1939) 24.

our report with the fact that Heraclides and Menedemus were running for election and were defeated by a narrow margin of votes. The apparent trustworthiness of this part of the report protects the rest of it against any suspicion.

Perhaps some would be inclined to infer from this that we should return to the pre-Jaegerian point of view, to the effect that the specific Aristotelian philosophy came into existence only in Athens, after Aristotle's return from Macedon, within some thirteen years before his death, or some seventeen if we count also the years between Speusippus' death and Aristotle's return. It is palpable how unsatisfactory and improbable such a solution would be.

Thus, the fact remains: Aristotle was forty-five, and it was only four years before he founded the Lyceum, when he still was considered by the members of the Academy as their fellow and only an external coincidence decided that Speusippus should not be succeeded by Aristotle.

The question how long Aristotle considered himself a Platonist has been discussed most recently by Cherniss.⁸ He tries particularly to prove (against Jaeger) that he did not do so when he wrote *Met.* A.9, more particularly that the well-known use of the first person plural in Aristotle's critique of the theory of ideas, contained in this chapter, is no proof of Aristotle's Platonism at that time. How, then, does Cherniss explain the use of this form? He asserts that *Met.* A.9 contains arguments taken by Aristotle from his earlier writings in which they were presented in the first person either because these writings were dialogues or because they were propounded from the point of view of a member of the Academy.⁹ Cherniss' reasoning seems methodically objectionable. He explains — and so do many other scholars operating upon the principle of later additions in Aristotle's writings — an apparent contradiction between a passage and its context by the assumption that this passage was taken from a different writing which presented a point of view with which the passage was compatible. But such an explanation only increases the difficulty. It is easier to contradict oneself in writing a page *uno ductu* than to do so in inserting a passage from an earlier document, particularly if this passage expresses a point of view no longer shared by the author. When one

⁸ H. Cherniss, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Academy*, 1 (Baltimore, 1944) 488 ff.

⁹ *Ibid.* 491.

is going to use — even by the scissors and paste method — a passage from one's former writings, one is almost compelled to re-examine one's opinions; thus, he who repeats himself literally indicates that he still — and pretty consciously — clings to his former opinion. Thus, if Cherniss admits (which he seems to do) that the first person plural originally indicated that it was a member of the Academy who spoke, he should admit that Aristotle by repeating this form *verbatim* emphatically re-designated himself a member of the Academy. Therefore, even if it could be proved that *Met.* A existed in its present shape before Speusippus' death, this still would not contradict the assumption that he, at the time of Speusippus' death, was still conscious of his community with the Academy — to use Frank's cautious wording.¹⁰

What is the relation of the Index to other reports on the events in question?

The main passages dealing with the problems of succession after the deaths of Plato and/or Speusippus are:

I. Diogenes Laërtius 4.1;

II. The so-called neo-Platonic life of Aristotle existing in three versions, the Marciana,¹¹ the Pseud-Ammoniana,¹² and the Latina;¹³

III. Diogenes Laërtius 5.1;¹⁴

IV. Ps.-Galen, *Hist. philos.* 3 (p. 599.14 Diels).

I. According to the first passage, Speusippus, when already paralyzed, sent for Xenocrates summoning him to come and take over the school.¹⁵

¹⁰ *AJPh* 61 (1940) 185.

¹¹ On the sources see: A. Busse, "Die neuplatonische Lebensbeschreibung des Aristoteles," *Hermes* 28 (1893) 252–276; A. Baumstark, *Aristoteles bei den Syrern* (Leipzig, 1900) 13 f., 36, 54; E. Howald, "Handbücher als Quellen des Diogenes Laërtius," *Philologus* 84 (1917) 119–130; idem, "Das philosophiegeschichtliche Compendium des Areios Didymos," *Hermes* 55 (1920) 68–98. According to Howald, the source of Marciana is a textbook, derived from Hermippus.

¹² According to Busse, *l.c.*, its author is Ps.-Elias; according to Howald, *l.c.*, it is again the textbook going back to Hermippus.

¹³ All three in V. Rose, *Aristotelis . . . fragmenta* (Leipzig, 1886) 426–450.

¹⁴ Gercke, in *RE* s. v. "Ariston" (52), claimed Ariston as source of this chapter. On Hermippus as one of the sources in Diogenes Laërtius 5.6, see U. v. Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Aristoteles und Athen* (Berlin, 1893) 2.403; on Hermippus in Diogenes Laërtius 5.22–27, see Schmidt-Stählin, *Gesch. d. gr. Lit.* 1⁵.672; in Diogenes Laërtius generally, W. Crönert, *Colotes und Menedemos* (Leipzig, 1906) 133, 135–137.

¹⁵ Cf. the 31st, 32nd, and 30th Socratic Letters with J. Sykutris, *Die Briefe des Sokrates und der Sokratiker* (Paderborn, 1933) 89–91.

There is probably nothing wrong with this report. Speusippus notified Xenocrates that he felt his death approaching, entreated him to come to Athens and to take over the school — which means that he knew that, to be elected, Xenocrates had to be in Athens at Speusippus' death. It is very possible that Speusippus was of the opinion that this recommendation would be sufficient to insure Xenocrates' election. We do not know whether he (at the same or at a different time) had addressed Aristotle. This is not impossible. It is not impossible, either, that he received word from Aristotle that he could not come. True, *prima facie* the words read as if Speusippus had appointed Xenocrates, but they can mean that he urged him to run as being his choice. The circumstantial nature of the report in the Index compared with Diogenes' vagueness makes it mandatory to interpret the testimony of Diogenes so as to make it compatible with the Index, not the other way round.

II. In the Marciana we read

(a) an account of the events after the death of Plato, to the effect that Speusippus took over the school, 'Ἀριστοτέλης δὲ στέλλεται εἰς Μακεδονίαν μεταπεμφθεὶς ὑπὸ Φιλίππου (or, in the Pseud-Ammoniana: 'Ἀριστοτέλης ἔρχεται ἐν τῇ τῶν Μακεδόνων γαίᾳ or, in the Latina, *Aristoteles autem mittitur in Macedonia*).¹⁶

This is wrong only if we assume that the author intended to give a full account of the events after Plato's death. But did he? Why should we not assume that he quite innocently omitted the five or so years between Plato's death and Aristotle's arrival in Macedonia?

Rose's apparatus shows, it is true, how Elias and Ps.-David misinterpreted the events. Both say that after Plato's death he was succeeded by Speusippus, *because* Aristotle at that time was absent from Athens and living in Macedon. While this is wrong, we can clearly see the way by which they arrived at their misunderstanding. They had read that, after Plato's death, Aristotle lived in Macedon (a misleading, but substantially correct report); they read, in some other source, that Aristotle did not succeed Speusippus *because* he, at that time, was in Macedon. They now combined the two reports. But this wrong combination at the same time proves that they were acquainted with a report contain-

¹⁶ Rose 429.10-14; 439.10-14; 444.17-20.

ing this *because* — a report similar to or identical with the report in the Index.¹⁷

(b) As to the events after Speusippus' death we read in the Marciana: τοῦ δὲ Σπενσίππου τελευτήσαντος οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς σχολῆς μεταπέμπονται τὸν Ἀριστοτέλη, καὶ διαδέχονται αὐτὴν αὐτὸς τε καὶ Ξενοκράτης σωφρονέστατα. Καὶ Ἀριστοτέλης μὲν ἐν Λυκείῳ, Ξενοκράτης δὲ ἐν Ἀκαδημίᾳ . . . ἐπαίδευσεν.¹⁸

With this, the Pseud-Ammoniana agrees completely, only replacing οἱ ἀπὸ σχολῆς by οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι.¹⁹ The Latina has, in one place, Aristophanes instead of Aristoteles, an obvious slip of the pen.

This, certainly, is a highly misleading report. And yet, decomposed into its elements, it shows correct statements. What is essentially misleading is, first, that the author of the report omits from his account the three years between the death of Speusippus and Aristotle's return to Athens. But here again, why should the author have been interested in them? All that really mattered to him was that, in the end, Aristotle returned to Athens sometime after the death of Speusippus and founded the Lyceum. True, here the report becomes most misleading: it presents Xenocrates and Aristotle as two heads of one and the same school, located in two buildings, just as we have it in Diogenes Laërtius 4.1. But here we may say: perhaps this was the way in which contemporaries saw it. To understand this, we don't have to assume any neo-Platonic tendency to harmonize Plato and Aristotle; it took quite a while to arrive at the conclusion that the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle are incompatible.²⁰

There is still a bit of information in the Marciana deserving some attention. What about the people who, after Speusippus' death, sent for Aristotle? It seems that we should simply accept this as a true report. Just as Speusippus wrote to Xenocrates, other members of the Academy wrote to Aristotle. What could be more natural? There were certainly factions within the Academy, and each was anxious to get its own candidate back to Athens.

¹⁷ Thus, there is an essential difference between the Ps.-Ammoniana and Elias and Ps.-David, contrary to what Busse asserted, *l.c.* (see note 11) 261 f.

¹⁸ Rose 431.16–20.

¹⁹ Rose 440.6–9.

²⁰ It is remarkable that there should be a trend in modern scholarship trying to prove that Aristotle, in spite of all his criticisms of Plato, never succeeded in establishing a philosophy actually differing from Plato's. See, e.g., H. Tredennick, *Aristotle; The Metaphysics*, Books I–IX (Loeb Classical Library, London, 1933) xxx; H. Cherniss, *op. cit.* (see note 8) 459 ff.

It is also possible that the above invitation was made after the members of the Academy learned of the death of Philip. As the Marciana is condensing events, "after the death of Speusippus" may very well mean "three years after the death of Speusippus." Thus, the report certainly makes sense. And indeed if, at the death of Speusippus, Aristotle was considered as a possible head of the Academy, nothing prevents us from assuming that three years later members of the Academy invited him to return to Athens.

III. Is there any possibility of deciding something about the source of our passage in the Index?

Some will, perhaps, think of Philochorus, as his name is mentioned in the Marciana²¹ on the one side, while some parts of the Index also seem to be derived from him.²² But such a conclusion would hardly be sound. The Marciana quotes Philochorus only in order to clarify some dates in Aristotle's life, while at 429.10 a new section starts, in no connection with the preceding and with nothing to indicate that Philochorus is still the source. But while Philochorus is out of the question, the third of our passages will, perhaps, permit a certain suggestion.

Hermippus noticed in his *Lives* that Aristotle was an Athenian envoy at the court of Philip when Xenocrates succeeded Speusippus. The assertion that Aristotle was an Athenian envoy makes no sense; but the report contains a correct temporal connection between Aristotle's absence and the succession of Xenocrates. Is it too bold to assume that, originally, the notice connected the two events by a *because* (which we found in Elias and Ps.-David)? And is it too bold to assume as a possibility that also the rest of the information of the Index was contained in the same passage of Hermippus, of which we find a remnant in Diogenes Laërtius?²³

IV. Thus, there remains only one passage flatly contradicting the Index, Ps.-Galen, *Hist. philos.* 3: Σπεύσιππος μὲν οὖν χρόνον τινὰ βραχὺν ἐπὶ τῆς αὐτοῦ αἰρέσεως διαμεμενηκώς, ἀθρητικοῖς δὲ νοσήμασι περιπεσών, Ξενοκράτην ἀντ' αὐτοῦ κατέστησε τῶν Πλατωνικῶν δογμάτων ἐξηγητήν.

²¹ Rose 429.5.

²² This, indeed, was the suggestion of Mekler, *op. cit.* (see note 5) xxviii f.

²³ In addition to the authorities cited in my footnotes 11, 12, and 14, see Heibges in *RE* s. v. "Hermippus" (6), esp. 851; U. v. Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Ad Ernestum Maasium epistula* (Berlin, 1880) 159; F. Leo, *Die griechisch-römische Biographie* (Leipzig, 1901) 124-127; *Didymos Kommentar zu Demosthenes* bearbeitet von H. Diels und W. Schubart (Berlin, 1904) xxxvii f.; W. Crönert, *op. cit.* (see note 14) 2-4; R. Hope, *The Book of Diogenes Laërtius* (New York, 1930) 61.

But here again, the mistake is simply the result of a condensation: Speusippus *invited* Xenocrates to come to Athens to take over the school; Xenocrates came and was *elected* — should we blame an historian, who, not particularly interested in the way in which the heads of the Academy succeeded each other, interpreted the invitation plus the subsequent election as an appointment?

Thus, the reliability of the report of the Index seems to be established beyond any doubt, and the philosophic implications of this report are of considerable interest.